

COLORECTAL CANCER – WHAT ARE THE RISK FACTORS?

Colorectal cancer is one of the most common cancers. Yet, as with many other cancers, there are lifestyle choices and changes that can be made that can dramatically reduce the risk of contracting this type cancer.

Diet, nutrition and physical activity all play a role in the risk-factor(s) of an individual's susceptibility to colorectal cancer. In a study conducted by the Continuous Update Project, over 29 million adults and over 247,000 cases of colorectal cancer were analysed and the findings released.

Increased physical activity decreased the risk for colon cancer, but were inconclusive for rectal cancer. Dietary adjustments to include food rich in fiber, calcium (including dairy) were found to decrease the risks associated with colorectal cancer. Food high in vitamin C and vitamin D were also found to help minimise the risks.

Foods that showed evidence linked to an increase in the risk of colorectal cancer included red meat and processed meats, the latter producing stronger evidence linking its consumption to cases of colorectal cancers. The former also showed links to an increase in breast cancer in pre-menopausal women.

This is not the first time that processed meats have come under scrutiny from research. In 2015 the Cancer division of the World Health Organisation (known as the Agency for Research on Cancer) went as far as to say that processed meat was 'carcinogenic' to humans.

Other factors that increase an individual's risk factor for colorectal cancer included:

- Excess alcohol consumption (more than 2-3 standard drinks per day)
- Being overweight
- Being obese
- Being overly tall

The conclusion reached by those who conducted the study was that returning to a plant-based diet of fruits, vegetables, beans and whole grains are the best weapons against colorectal cancer. These sorts of foods not only help with weight management, but they actively possess compounds that can ward off illnesses like colorectal cancer.

Whilst there is no silver bullet for cancer, there are choices ones can make around diet and lifestyle that can dramatically reduce the risks.

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